Kunsan loaders rock Team Osan during semi-annual weapons fest

Wolf Pack breaks tie-breaker to reign supreme over peninsula

By Senior Airman Stephen Collier
Wolf Pack public affairs

Members of Kunsan Air Base's aircraft maintenance squadron weapons section beat out Osan Air Base's equivalent after two fierce weapons loading competitions in 2005 to be named best weapons loading team on the Korean peninsula during the second annual weapons fest Saturday.

Each weapons team, one from the 8th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Kunsan and the other from the 51st AMXS at Osan, competed in the annual event to prove who is the "best of the best" of Korean peninsula weapons loaders, according to Master Sgt. James Lomax, 8th AMXS weapons standardization supervisor.

"This load competition is important for two reasons," Sgt. Lomax said. "It brings Osan and Kunsan together in a friendly competition and it shows who the best of the best is in the weapons world on the peninsula."

During the approximately 50-minute competition, both crews were neck-and-neck, loading the MK-82 general purpose bomb, AIM-120 medium-range missile and Guided Bomb Unit-12 laser-guided munition almost simultaneously. Osan's load crew, led by Staff Sgt.

Christopher Manning, had a small, but early lead in the beginning.

"I think we did awesome ... it felt smooth," he recalled directly after the competition. "[We were] a little rocky at first because we aren't used to loading here, but once we got in the groove, it went good."

During the competition, crews are evaluated in several areas, including the proficiency of the load, how safely the crews load the munitions and the reliability of the weapons being placed on the F-16. Sgt. Lomax pointed out each portion of the evaluation is crucial to the overall success of the team.

"From a safety aspect, when we load the weapons, we want to make sure they (the weapons loaders) aren't going to pull wires or safety pins before they need to be," he said. "We also grade on proficiency, or how well they learned what we trained them to do. Lastly, we look at the reliability of the munition. When that bomb or missile comes off the aircraft, we need to ask if it's going to work."

As both crews finished preparing their aircraft to receive the state-of-the-art weapons, Kunsan's team, led by Staff Sgt. Hector Ybanez, inched

out in front and never looked back.

"As a crew, it makes us feel great to load up a jet like this," Sgt. Ybanez admitted. "We make sure it's safe, reliable and good to go. It's great for the weapons community to come out. It's just a great feeling."

Each team finished loading their respective aircraft, embraced their fellow weapons Airmen and headed off to a joint barbeque between the bases where they awaited the results of the competition. An hour later, Kunsan was announced as the winner.

Chief Master Sgt. Dexter Mitchell, 8th Fighter Wing weapons manager, said the end result of the competition, regardless of the winner, is honed war-time skills for each loader.

"The sign over my office says 'without weapons, the Air Force is just another airline,'" Chief Mitchell said. "It's important we know how to load weapons and do it quickly and efficiently and do it in a way that when the munitions drop, they will function like they should. In the end, this competition gives us a chance to see how we react if we have to Take the Fight North. From the looks of it, we're ready if it ever comes to that."

At a glance ...
The weapons of the load competition

GBU-12
Laser-Guided Munition

The Guided Bomb Unit-12 utilizes a 2,000-pound general purpose or penetrating warhead. The operator illuminates a target with a laser designator, guiding the munition to the spot of laser energy.

AIM-120
Air to Air Missile

The AIM-120 is an advanced medium-range air-to-air missile. It has an all-weather, beyond-visual-range capability.

MK-82
General Purpose Bomb

The MK-82 is a free-fall, non-guided general purpose 500-pound bomb. The bomb is usually equipped with the mechanical M904 (nose) and M905 (tail) fuses or the radar-proximity FMU-113 air-burst fuse.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Wolfe
Airman 1st Class Brett Hixson double checks his load of an AIM-120 medium-range missile.

Photo by Senior Airman Stephen Collier
Senior Airman Shakkia Courtney puts the finishing touches on the Guided Bomb Unit, or GBU-12.

Photo illustration by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Wolfe
An 8th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron weapons and standardization evaluator reads off the rules of engagement for weapons loading to the Kunsan team Saturday.